ADAM PASH AND GINA TRAPANI

lifehacker

THIRD EDITION

Lifehacker

The Guide to Working Smarter, Faster, and Better

Third Edition

Adam Pash
Gina Trapani

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— Adam Pash

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Introduction

"The highest-performing people I know are those who have installed the best tricks in their lives."

—David Allen, productivity expert[1]

Every day, you have dozens of opportunities to get work done faster, smarter, and more efficiently, but you'll find no single, magical productivity secret contained within the pages of this book. Yet we firmly believe that, judiciously applied, the proper combination of shortcuts, tricks, and improvements to your workflow can notably increase the efficiency with which you work, communicate, and accomplish tasks. Small changes, practiced and perfected over time, yield big results.

The goal of this book, the Lifehacker.com website, and the weekly Lifehacker video series is simple: discover, test, and curate shortcuts and tricks for making modern life easier and doing things better. Every year, personal computers, smart phones, email, the Web, and other contemporary technologies play an increasingly significant role in our lives; accordingly, much of this book focuses on using these tools more efficiently. These technologies — intended to improve how we communicate and streamline how we work — often complicate rather than supplement our ability to live and work more productively. This doesn't have to be the case.

We've spent the last six years testing every website, software application, and gadget promising to make your life easier on Lifehacker.com. This book highlights the cream of that crop. These tricks can fast-track you through tedious work, solve common computer problems we all face, and give you access to information anywhere you need it. Whether you're a

middle manager at a huge corporation or a freelancer who works at home, a PC or Mac user, someone just comfortable enough to get around your computer or a power user, there's something here for you.

The most precious thing anyone has in this life is time. Spend more time *doing* things and less time fiddling with your computer. This book shows you how.

Computer Manual Meets Productivity Book

This book isn't a computer user manual, and it isn't a productivity system — it's a little bit of each. It isn't an exhaustive guide to all the features of a particular software application or gadget. You won't find seven habits or four steps to becoming a productivity powerhouse. Instead, this book takes established personal-productivity principles and outlines 121 concrete ways to apply those concepts in your everyday work. This is where the rubber hits the road, dear reader: here, you learn how to practice big-picture productivity methods on your computer desktop.

Lifehacker isn't a software or gadget company; we don't champion specific tools or services to promote our own products (although we do write software that we give away for free). We're simply enthusiastic and experienced technologists obsessed with the ways that technology can help get things done. In this book, you can find information you won't get in the user manual: practical applications of the features you should actually care about, and nothing else. Alpha geeks use the tools outlined in this book. Now it's time for you to get in on the good stuff as well.

Pick Your Tricks

Think of this book as a giant buffet of shortcuts. No one person will use all of them. Browse its contents and add to your plate only the ones that can help you. Instead of reading this book from cover to cover, read each chapter introduction, which describes a productivity challenge. The rest of the chapter is a collection of clever tricks — or *hacks* — that can tackle it. The best hacks for your work and life depend on your needs, your skill level, your situation, and your biggest pain points.

For example, do you get too much email and struggle to keep on top of all your incoming messages? Go directly to Chapter 1, "Control Your Email." Have you been procrastinating on checking anything off an impossibly long to-do list? Proceed to Chapter 3, "Trick Yourself into Getting Done." Are constant interruptions and distractions keeping you from getting work

done? See Chapter 5, "Firewall Your Attention." Want to shave seconds or minutes off of computer chores you do every day? You want Chapter 6, "Streamline Common Tasks." Eager to put your new smartphone to work and avoid the pitfalls of that tiny touchscreen? Head straight to Chapter 9, "Work Smarter on Your Smart Phone."

To help you choose your best tricks, each hack appears with the skill level of the user to whom it applies, the platform (or operating systems) on which it is performed, and the cost required to accomplish the hack.

Your Skill Level

If you're a power user worried this book will be too basic, or a beginner wondering whether it's too technical, fear not. Each hack in this book has a user skill-level rating — Easy, Medium, or Advanced:

- **Easy:** You are comfortable enough on your computer to get by, but that's it. You know how to browse the folders on your computer's hard drive to attach a document to an email message. You know there are lots of interesting tech tricks out there that you want to know how to do, but you don't know where to start. You want the hacks labeled "Easy."
- **Medium:** You've been using computers for some time now and you're comfortable putting together Excel formulas, downloading music, finding elusive information on Google, or helping your grandpa get his email set up. Maybe you have your own blog, and you set up a wireless Internet connection at home yourself. You should check out the hacks labeled "Medium" and "Easy."
- **Advanced:** You're the family tech-support geek, the one everyone calls when they have a computer problem. You survived a hard drive crash or two; maybe you administer a website. You've delved into the deepest settings on your computer, such as the Windows Registry, or you have experience at the command line — or at least feel confident that you can teach yourself those things easily. Hacks marked "Easy" may be yawners to you, but the "Advanced" and "Medium" hacks can feed your head.

Your Operating System (Matters Less, but Still Matters)

As operating systems converge and the Web matures, desktop operating systems matter less. As application software moves off your desktop, onto the

Web, and into your pockets, it takes only an Internet-connected device with a modern web browser from any OS to get things done (more on that topic in Hack 68). Today, file and network compatibility among Mac, Windows versions, and even Linux is a nonissue. You can do things on your smart phone that were previously relegated to a desktop computer — sometimes even better than you could with a PC. More open-source software is cross-platform and free (such as Mozilla Firefox and Google Chrome, which appear throughout this book). Almost all other software has an equivalent on other operating systems. In the coming years you'll use more computers with more operating systems than you ever did before. (Weren't you just considering switching to a Mac? Or was it Linux?)

Therefore, this book is as operating system-inclusive as possible. Whenever possible, we recommend software that runs on Windows, Mac, and Linux; on mobile platforms, we cover both Apple's iOS and Google's Android operating system. However, the platform listed on many of the hacks is simply "Web," which applies to everyone.

The Cost

You've got enough to spend your money on without dumping hundreds of dollars on software solutions to your problems. More often than not, the hacks in this book won't cost you anything beyond the time it takes to follow the instructions. The free and open source software movement plays a significant role in the Lifehacker ethos, and whenever possible, we opt for free software solutions.

What's New in the Third Edition?

If you need a reminder of how quickly technology transforms the way we live, look back no further than the three years between this and the previous edition of this book, released in March of 2008.

Microsoft launched Windows 7 in the fall of 2009, a considerable and welcome step forward not only for the Windows operating system, but for Windows users. (If you recall, three years ago many Windows users still used Windows XP, having decided that an operating system first released in 2001 was superior to the maligned Windows Vista.) In the summer of 2008, Apple launched their App Store and substantially evolved the iOS operating system, creating new expectations for all smart phones and mobile devices along the way. Google evolved beyond search and productivity webapps, releasing their own web browser, Google Chrome (late summer,

2008) and mobile operating system, Android (fall, 2008). Tablet computers have finally reached mass appeal, starting with the consumer-friendly iPad and expanding to devices powered by Android, BlackBerry, and other mobile operating systems.

This edition reflects these considerable changes. Most significantly, Chapter 9 focuses exclusively on getting more from your smart phone — a now ubiquitous piece of personal technology that was in its nascence when the previous edition was released. You'll also find new and updated hacks in every chapter, employing tools and operating system features that weren't available three years ago. Every OS-specific hack in this book has been updated to work with the most recent versions of Windows and Mac OS X.

What the Heck Is a Lifehacker?

Contrary to the popular misuse of the term to denote a computer criminal, a *hacker* is someone who solves a problem in a clever or little-known way. A *life hack* is a workaround or shortcut that overcomes the everyday difficulties of the modern worker. A *lifehacker* uses clever tech tricks to get work done.

A Brief History of Life Hacks

In 2004, tech journalist Danny O'Brien interviewed several people he called "over-prolific alpha geeks" — skilled and highly productive technologists whose continuous output seemed unaffected by the constant disruptions of modern technology. O'Brien hoped to identify patterns in the way these productive techies managed their work processes. Commonalities did emerge, and the term *life hacks* was born.[2]

These so-called alpha geeks had developed uncommon systems and tricks for getting through their daily drudgery. They used simple, flexible tools such as text files and email. They avoided bloated, complex software. They imposed their own structures on their information and set up mechanisms that filtered and pushed the data they needed in front of their eyes at the right time automatically while keeping the rest at bay.

The life hacks concept resonated with geeks across the Internet, including the one typing these words. A movement was born. In January 2005, Lifehacker.com was born, a daily weblog devoted to life hacks. Six years later, we have the privilege of sharing the best life hacks that came out of that work with you in these pages.

Just remember: on your deathbed, you'll never say, "I wish I'd checked my email more often!" Go forth and start using tech to spend less time working and more time living.

References

1. David Allen, *Getting Things Done* (Penguin Books, 2001), p. 85.
2. "Interview: father of 'life hacks' Danny O'Brien," Lifehacker.com, March 17, 2005 (`http://lifehacker.com/software/interviews/interview-father-of-life-hacks-danny-obrien-036370.php`).